

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6451

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Energy, Telecommunications & Utilities, February 1, 1996
Ways & Means, February 6, 1996

Title: An act relating to the state energy office.

Brief Description: Eliminating the state energy office.

Sponsors: Senators Sutherland, Finkbeiner and Winsley; by request of Governor Lowry.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy, Telecommunications & Utilities: 1/23/96, 2/1/96
[DPS-WM].
Ways & Means, 2/5/96, 2/6/96 [DP2S].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, TELECOMMUNICATIONS & UTILITIES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6451 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Sutherland, Chair; Loveland, Vice Chair; and Owen.

Staff: Phil Moeller (786-7445)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 6451 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Rinehart, Chair; Loveland, Vice Chair; Bauer, Drew, Fraser, Hargrove, Kohl, Pelz, Quigley, Roach, Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel, Sutherland, West and Winsley.

Staff: Susan Lucas (786-7711)

Background: The Washington State Energy Office is a cabinet-level agency that is charged with a variety of functions pertaining to energy policy, with an emphasis on energy conservation. A section of the 1995-97 biennial budget bill directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to study the best manner to close the Energy Office and report to the Legislature by November 1, 1995.

Summary of Second Substitute Bill: Functions of the Washington State Energy Office are transferred to other state agencies and entities.

Duties pertaining to energy policy and planning, and the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) are transferred to the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development.

Responsibility for implementing energy education, applied research and technology transfer programs is transferred to Washington State University.

Powers, duties, and functions pertaining to the Commute Trip Reduction Program are transferred to the Department of Transportation. A report to the Legislature on this transfer is required.

The Department of General Administration is given the powers, duties, and functions pertaining to energy efficiency in public buildings.

Membership of EFSEC is modified to eliminate representation from the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Energy Office, and the Office of Financial Management, and a member from the Military Department is added.

Technical corrections are made throughout the statutes to reflect the transfers of duties and responsibilities. Several sections pertaining directly to the Energy Office are repealed.

Employees who are terminated as a result of the Energy Office closure receive the following services from the Department of Personnel: placement in the reduction in force transition pool; career transition services; placement on the Washington Management Service Clearinghouse register; \$150 per month for up to one year for health benefits purchased under the federal COBRA; 30 weeks of unemployment benefits; and dislocated worker training services (for employees in industry unique positions). These services will enable terminated employees to transition to other positions within state government or to obtain employment with other entities. Terminated employees may also receive extended health benefits after separation from employment.

Second Substitute Compared to Substitute: Provisions relating to benefits available to terminated employees are changed to include access to employment registers, money for health benefits for up to one year after separation, unemployment benefits, career transition services and dislocated worker benefits for certain employees.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Several additional corrections were made to the original bill. The original bill did not contain the required report on the transfer of Commute Trip Reduction responsibilities to the Department of Transportation, and did not contain provisions pertaining to compensation and early retirement benefits for terminated Energy Office employees.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 23, 1996.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 1996.

Testimony For (Energy, Telecommunications & Utilities): This legislation has been developed from an interim process focusing on closing the Energy Office. It places different programs into agencies with a variety of appropriate missions.

Testimony Against (Energy, Telecommunications & Utilities): None.

Testified (Energy, Telecommunications & Utilities): PRO: Devone Smith, Tom Lineham, WFSE; Larry Ganders, WSU; Gerry O’Keefe, OFM; Scott Merriman, WA Environmental Council; Jim Harding, Seattle City Light; Charlie Brown; Mike Tracy, Puget Power.

Testimony For (Ways & Means): Some employees of the Energy Office will not have transfer rights to other Washington State jobs. Consideration should be given to these employees.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): None.

Testified (Ways & Means): Bev Hermanson, WA Federation of State Employees.